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ABSTRACT

This study guide seeks to provide resources to bring the voices and experiences of Panamanian students into classrooms. This guide includes: (1) "History of a Canal" (in English and Spanish) (Pablo Neruda); (2) "Poems by Cubena"; (3) "Maps of Panama and The Canal Zone"; (4) "Historical Overview: Panama (1501-1992)"; (5) "Molas" (Maria Garza-Lubeck); and (6) a bibliography. Contains 41 references. (EH)

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Country of Contrasts

A Study Guide on Panama

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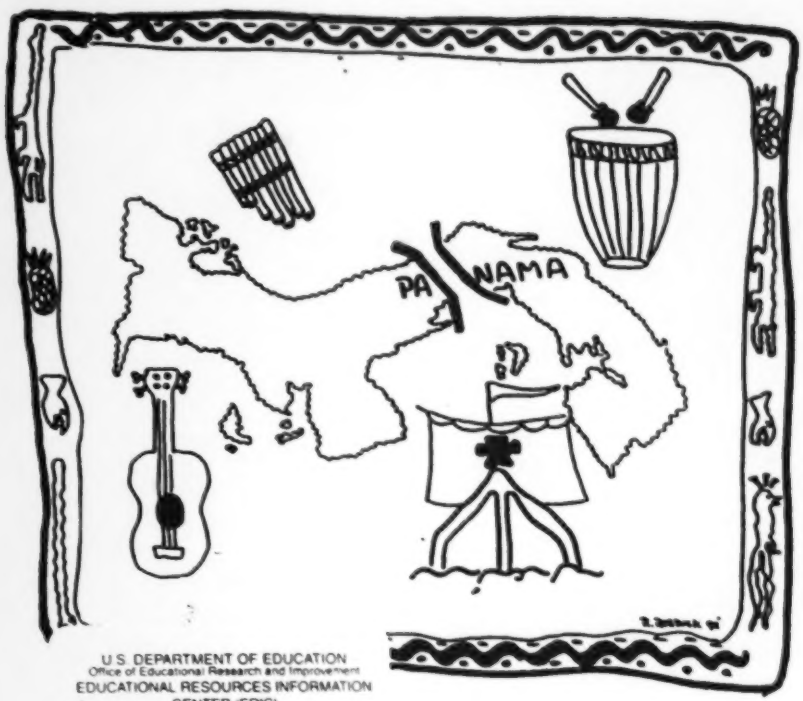

As native cane flutes celebrate another bountiful harvest, Spanish galleons slowly approach the Isthmus of Panama. The song of celebration becomes a mournful dirge.

Another beat is heard along the Panamanian shore. It is the African drum beating memories of the motherland and stories of resistance.

The flute and the drum are joined by the guitar, played by the criollo, born of the conquistador but native of the New World.

Listen to the sounds of Panama – crossroads of continents and cultures, a nation created and then sliced in half for the sake of world commerce. Whether we will hear harmony or discord is the challenge facing the people of Panama today.

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Acknowledgements

It is hoped that this **Study Guide on Panama** will provide educators with resources to begin to bring the voices and experiences of Panamanian students into their classrooms. We hope to expand this guide into a special issue of the NECA newsletter. Please share comments about the guide and suggestions for additional readings to be included. Thank you.

The compilation of this guide by the **Network of Educators on Central America** and the **Coalition for African-American and Latino Unity** was made possible by a grant from the **D.C. Communities Humanities Council**. We appreciate their support.

Credits

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Philip E. Wheaton

Historia de Un Canal

por Pablo Neruda

Panamá, te otorgó la geografía
un don que no entregó a tierra ninguna:
avanzaron dos mares a tu encuentro:
se adelgazó la cordillera pura;
en vez de darte un mar te dio las aguas
de los dos soberanos de la espuma
y te besa el Atlántico con labios
acostumbrados a besar las uvas
mientras que el mar Pacífico sacude
en tu honor su ciclóna estatura.
Y bien pequeña Panamá, hermanita,
ahora me llegan las primeras dudas
te las diré al oído porque creo
que hay que hablar en silencio la amargura.
Y qué pasó? Hermanita, recortaron,
como si fuera un queso, tu figura,
y luego te comieron y dejaron
como un hueso roído de aceituna.
Yo lo supe más tarde, estaba hecho
el canal como un río de la luna:
por ese río llegaría el mundo
derramando en tu arena la fortuna,
pero unos caballeros de otra parte
instalaron en ti sus armaduras
y no te derramaron sino whisky
desde que hipotecaron tu cintura:
y todo sigue como fue planeado
por Satanás y por sus imposturas:
con su dinero hicieron el canal,
cavaron tierra con la sangre tuya
y ahora en Nueva York mandan los dólares
y te dejan a ti las sepulturas.

From **El Canal de Panama: Calvario de un Pueblo**
by Julio Yau, Editorial Mediteraneo, Madrid, 1972.

History of a Canal

by Pablo Neruda

Panamá, geography presented you
a gift which it did not give another land:
two oceans rushed to meet you:
the pure mountain range narrowed;
in place of giving you a sea it gave you the waters
of the two sovereigns of foam
and the Atlantic kisses you with lips
accustomed to kissing grapes
while the Pacific shakes
her cyclonic stature in your honor.
And tiny Panama, little sister,
now my first doubts begin
I'll whisper them in your ear because I believe
that we must talk in silence of the bitterness.
And what happened little sister?
they trimmed your figure as though you were cheese
and later, they ate you and left you
like an olive pit.
I learned of it later, the canal
was done as a river of the moon:
through this river the world would arrive
pouring their fortune onto your sands
but certain gentlemen from other parts
installed on you their armaments
and did not pour anything but whiskey
since they mortgaged your waist:
and everything continues as was planned
by Satan and his imposters:
with their money they built the canal,
they dug the earth with your blood
and now they send the dollars to New York
and leave the graves to you.

From **Panama: Sovereignty for a Land Divided**
by Phil Wheaton, EPICA Task Force, 1976.
Translated by Gail Phares

• • • •

Poems by Cubena

Lunacy

What is lunacy? Lunacy is:
A small Portuguese mouse
fancying himself
in control of

THREE
AFRICAN
ELEPHANTS

And what is super lunacy?
Measly Portugal
taking control of

GUINEA-BISSAU
MOZAMBIQUE
ANGOLA

Definition

What is a
1 2
N
E
9 - NEGRO - 3
R
O
6

In Yankeeland
or in Panama?

A time bomb

tic-tac-tic-tac-tic-tac
tik-tak-tik-tak-tik-tak
TIC-TAC-TIC-TAK-TIK-TAK

Gatún

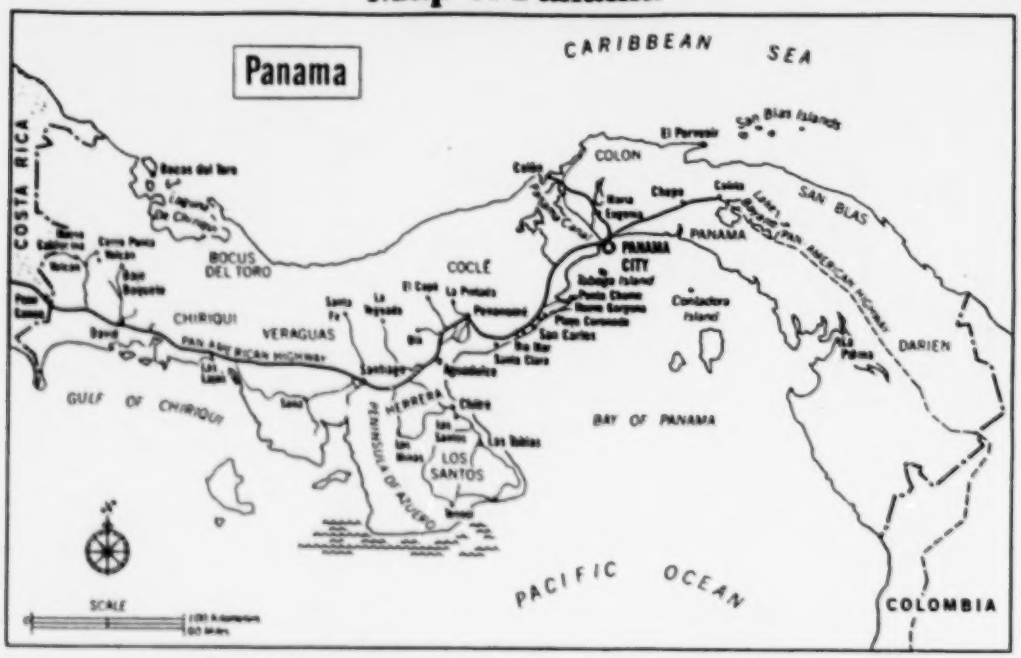
We don't want

K K K
r o o
i c l
n a a
g
a

nor hamburger
nor imperialist $
Teddy the thief
we want JUSTICE

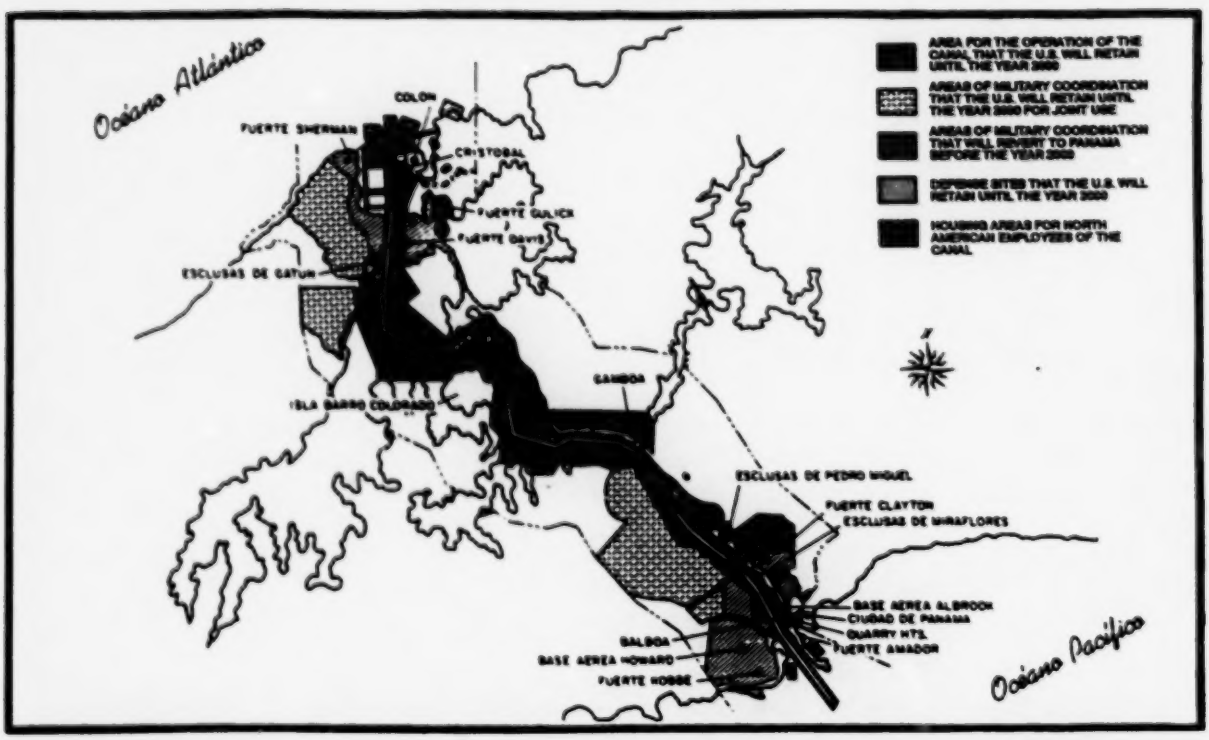
Cubena is the pen-name of **Carlos Guillermo Wilson**, an African born in Panama of Jamaican and Bajan forebears. He now resides in Los Angeles and is a professor of Spanish at Loyola Marymout University. These poems were originally published in Spanish in *Pensamientos del negro Cubena*, Los Angeles: n.p., 1977. Translated by Ian Isidore Smart and printed in Wilson, C.G., *Short stories by Cubena*, Washington: Afro-Hispanic Institute, 1987, Translated, introduction and notes by Ian Isidore Smart.

Map of Panama



Source: Fodor's Central America. New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, 1987

The Canal Zone


Oceano Atlántico
COLON
FUERTE SHERMAN
CRISTOBAL
FUERTE GULICK
FUERTE DAVIS
ESCLUSAS DE GATUN
ISLA BARRO COLORADO
GAMBOA
ESCLUSAS DE PEDRO MIGUEL
FUERTE CLAYTON
ESCLUSAS DE MIRAFLORES
BASE AEREA ALBROOK
CIUDAD DE PANAMA
QUARRY HTS.
FUERTE AMADOR
BALBOA
BASE AEREA HOWARD
FUERTE HOBBE
Oceano Pacífico
AREA FOR THE OPERATION OF THE CANAL THAT THE U.S. WILL RETAIN UNTIL THE YEAR 2000
AREAS OF MILITARY COORDINATION THAT THE U.S. WILL RETAIN UNTIL THE YEAR 2000 FOR JOINT USE
AREAS OF MILITARY COORDINATION THAT WILL REVERT TO PANAMA BEFORE THE YEAR 2000
DEFENSE SITES THAT THE U.S. WILL RETAIN UNTIL THE YEAR 2000
HOUSING AREAS FOR NORTH AMERICAN EMPLOYEES OF THE CANAL

This map indicates the disposition of various areas as the Panama Canal Treaties go into effect. The broken lines indicate the boundaries of the old Canal Zone under the jurisdiction of the United States until October 1, 1979 The total width of the Canal Zone was ten miles. Source: Panama Canal Commission, May 1990

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Historical Overview: Panama

For thousands of years, Panama was inhabited by three different groups of people. In the western highlands lived the Guaymí. Also in the west lived the Chocó people. Along the northern coast lived the Kuna who were skilled potters, stonecutters and artisans. All these people lived in decentralized villages and had systems of communal agriculture.

1501 Members of a Spanish expedition led by Rodrigo de Bastidas become the first Europeans to set foot in Panama. The following year, Christopher Columbus visits Panama. In 1509, settlements are established in what was then called Darién. Vasco Núñez de Balboa, a member of the Bastidas' crew is chosen to administer the settlements. In 1513, he crosses the isthmus and on September 29 reaches the Pacific Ocean. Balboa claims for Spain all the lands which bordered on this sea. But due to internal rivalries, Balboa is beheaded in 1517.

1519 Panama City founded by Pedro Arias Dávila. Although the Spaniards don't find gold on the isthmus, it becomes a major shipping point for treasures plundered from Peru. The founders also encourage agricultural self-sufficiency, but the economy of Panama becomes primarily dependent on the volume of goods shipped through its ports. The indigenous people are enslaved to load ships work plantations, but many die of the harsh conditions or flee to remote parts of the country. Many of the Kuna settle on the San Blas Islands and the Caribbean littoral, where they live to this day. For these reasons, Spain begins sending Africans to work as slaves. Many escape and form rebel communities of 'maroons' or *cimarrones* in the mountains, led by the "Black King" Bayano.

Over the next 300 years intermixing of indigenous, Spanish and African people produces a predominantly black and mestizo population which characterizes the Panamanian people. But the indigenous remain at the bottom of the social ladder, while descendents of the Spaniards become the ruling elite.

1534 The idea of a canal is first raised when King Charles V of Spain orders the territorial governor to study the possibility of joining the Chagres River and the Pacific.

1671. In the seventeenth century, Panama's warehouses and treasure-laden ships attract the attention of pirates. Panama City is attacked and destroyed by British pirate Henry Morgan.

1694 William Patterson, founder of the Bank of England, tries to interest the English king in a canal through the Isthmus of Panama.

1700s By 1740, Panama had lost its near-monopoly on shipping to Spain, and falls into economic decline.

1821 Panama gains independence from Spain and becomes a province of Gran Colombia.

1849 The California Gold Rush makes Panama a valuable transit route the U.S. east coast to California.

1850 U.S. businessmen finance construction of 48-mile Panama Railway, completed in 1855. Seven thousand foreign laborers including 3,000 Chinese come to work on the railroad.

1856 U.S. troops protect the trans-isthmian railroad from possible attacks by Panamanian independence forces for next nine years.

1865 U.S. troops intervene three times in the next eight years to protect U.S. business interests.

1878 French Panama Canal Company acquires exclusive right to build canal through Panama. Construction begins in 1881, mostly with labor brought in from the Caribbean islands. By 1889, the Company had collapsed and construction halted.

1898 U.S. takes most of Spain's remaining colonies, including Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines, and emerges as a world power after the Spanish-American War. Travel of naval ships between the east and west coasts takes on new strategic importance.

1899 Civil war breaks out in Colombia.

1902 U.S. Congress authorizes the president to acquire from Colombia a strip of land in Panama to build a canal. The U.S. paid $10 million plus $250,000 a year rent.

I took the Canal, and let the Congress debate.
- Theodore Roosevelt

1903 The Colombian senate rejects a U.S. request to build a canal through Panama.

On Nov. 3, with U.S. backing Panama declares independence from Colombia; the new flag is raised by a member of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as three U.S. gunboats prevent the landing of Colombian troops.

Nov. 18, the Hay-Bunau-Varilla Treaty was signed by the U.S. Secretary of State and a Frenchman, with no Panamanians present. The treaty, ratified on February 26, 1904, granted the U.S. use, occupation and control of Canal Zone, a five-mile wide strip on either side of the Canal and gave the U.S. unprecedented power to intervene in Panama's internal affairs.

1904 Panama establishes monetary system based on U.S. dollar. To this day, only U.S. paper money is used in Panama; Panamanian coins exist but are interchangeable with U.S. coins.

1914 Panama Canal completed. The first ship, the *Ancon*, passes August 3.

Eighty-three thousand laborers worked on the Canal. Most came from Caribbean islands, including 20,000 from Barbados - 40% of the adult male population of that island. Due to harsh conditions and unsanitary camps, 25,000 workers died of accidents or disease -- 500 lives lost for every mile of the Canal. When the Canal was completed, some returned home or migrated to the U.S., But many stayed, adding another layer to Panama's rich social structure. Known as *negros antillanos*, they speak French or English, and have tried to maintain their language and culture. Social tensions and conflicts exist between them and the *negros coloniales*, as the descendents of Africans who came in the 17th century are known.

1918 U.S. Marines occupy the province of Chiriquí and stay two years to maintain public order.

1925 U.S. troops break a rent strike (led by the *Movimiento Inquilinario*) in Panama City, patrolling streets for twelve days.

1945 After World War II, the headquarters of the U.S. military's Southern Command are established in the Canal Zone. The School of the Americas is also established as a U.S.-run military academy to train officers throughout the hemisphere. It becomes known as the *escuela de golpes* (School of Coups).

1964 U.S. citizens attack Panamanians attempting to raise a Panamanian flag alongside a U.S. flag at a high school in the Canal Zone. U.S. troops intervene resulting in over 20 deaths, 300 injuries and $2 million in property damage. When the Panamanian government breaks off relations with the U.S., the U.S. agrees to raise the flag and negotiate a new canal treaty. After three years, the U.S. proposed-treaty is rejected by Panama.

1968 General Omar Herrera Torrijos overthrows President Arnulfo Arias Madrid. His regime is nationalistic, reformist and populist, winning him popularity among the working classes and breaking the power of the oligarchy that had ruled Panama for decades. He institutes a progressive labor code and agrarian reform, increases social spending and attempts to integrate the lower social classes into Panamanian society. He stresses education making university education accessible to working class students and to the indigenous people. From the U.S., he demands sovereignty over the Canal.

I don't want to enter the history books. I want to enter the Canal Zone.
- General Omar Torrijos

1977 A new treaty negotiated by Torrijos and Jimmy Carter provides gradual takeover of canal by Panama and withdrawal of U.S. troops by 1999. In a plebiscite, 66% of Panamanian voters approve the Treaty. However, the U.S. reserves the right to intervene to protect the security of the canal.

1981 General Torrijos killed in a plane crash under very suspicious circumstances, only six months after Ronald Reagan took office. The social progress and national unity he achieved collapses.

We bought it, we paid for it, we built it, and we should tell Torrijos and company that we are going to keep it.
- Ronald Reagan

1983 Panama takes on a peace-making role in the region, hosting the Contadora conference and joining Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela in promoting the Contadora Peace Plan.

1984 General Manuel Antonio Noriega, graduate of the School of the Americas and head of Panama's "G-2" military intelligence agency, becomes commander of the Panama Defense Forces and *de facto* head of the government. Noriega had been on the CIA payroll since 1967 and U.S. officials had known since the 1970s about Noriega's involvement in drug and arms smuggling. But Noriega was seen as compliant with U.S. policy in Central America (conflicting with Panama's role in the Contadora Plan) and willing to interpret the canal treaty in terms favorable to U.S. military desires.

1985 In the face of economic crisis and civil unrest, Noriega forces President Ardito Barletta to resign and installs Eric Arturo Delvalle as president.

1986 Relations between Noriega and the U.S. begin to sour.

1988 Feb. 5, two U.S. grand juries in Florida indict Noriega on charges of providing protection for international drug traffickers and permitting drug profits to be laundered through Panamanian banks.

People of Panama: you have been deceived. And now only one recourse remains: that this generation offer its life so that other generations will find here a free nation.
- General Omar Torrijos

Feb. 26, President Delvalle is ousted by National Assembly after trying to oust Noriega. The U.S. freezes assets belonging to the government of Panama and initiates efforts to remove Noriega. He survives several coup attempts and U.S. economic pressure.

1989 May 7, presidential elections are held, with opposition candidate Guillermo Endara strongly favored. On May 10, Noriega nullifies the results. Electoral fraud was widespread on the part of both pro-Noriega and pro-U.S. forces. The U.S. steps up military and economic pressure, while the Organization of American States attempts a negotiated solution.

Dec. 20, U.S. invades Panama with 27,000 troops and installs Endara as president. It was the largest U.S. military action since the Vietnam War. Reports of civilian deaths range from official U.S. figures of 250 to up to 7,000.

1990 Jan. 3, Noriega surrenders. He is brought back to the U.S. and imprisoned without bail.

1992 April 9, Noriega is convicted on eight counts of racketeering and drug trafficking by a U.S. District Court in Miami.

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Molas

María Garza-Lubeck

Mola illustration: From *Panama's Position: From the Threshold to the Present.* Panama: Asociación Panameña de Relaciones Internacionales, 1973.

The Kuna Indians of the San Blas Islands off the coast of Panama have contributed a unique art form to the rest of the world - the mola. A mola was originally a suit or a dress, but today is primarily manifested in women's blouses or wall hangings. In essence, a mola is a beautiful and intricate reverse appliqué featuring an inlay technique that can vary in thickness from two to four layers of material. Bright colors such as red, yellow and orange are the predominant favorites for molas. The background is usually a darker color, such as dark blue, green or black. The most common stitches are the hem, or blind stitch, used for joining layers of material, and the running and chain stitches, used to illustrate details such as eyes and mouths.

Woman's Day (May 1966) in "A Fascinating Craft from Panama: Reverse Appliqué," describes the mola technique:

> Conventional appliqué is usually done by cutting under the raw edges to the shapes and then sewing them to another, larger piece of fabric to form a complete design. But the Kuna women work in reverse. They take several pieces of cotton fabric of different colors and baste them together along the outer edges; then working from the top layer down they cut through the various layers to create fanciful designs. As the shapes are cut out, the edges of the openings created are turned under and sewn to the fabric underneath. The color that shows through the openings depends on the number of layers which are cut through a particular place.

It is ironic to note that in the 1920's local government leaders sought to abolish the mola. They felt it more progressive to have the women of the islands adopt plain dresses. While there was no organized resistance, many women chose to ignore the rule. The mola endured.

All grade levels can participate in making molas. Younger children can make molas using colored construction paper, burlap, or felt by pasting the different layers of materials used. Designs can also be kept simple. Fish, worms, butterflies, flowers, birds, etc., are suitable for elementary students.

Junior and senior high school students may be challenged by using more intricate designs and sewing, instead of pasting, their mola. Jorge Enciso's *Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico* offers a wide variety of prints that can be used as designs. The students may even wish to use a more personal design. Modern Kuna women use motifs taken from day-to-day living. Molas featuring everything from religious ceremonies to a can of sardines, complete with wording and illustrations, are reflective of Kuna daily life.

Materials

Several colors of construction paper or fabric
Needle and thread
Scissors
Glue

Instructions

1. Students choose their design and draw it on scratch paper.
2. Have the students decide on the size of their mola. The traditional size measures 16" by 24". It would be wise not to make them any larger. Younger children will work best with small molas.
3. Four colors to work with is the most desirable number. Two should be the full length of the mola. Younger children may insert pieces of the other two colors into the molas.
4. "Draw the central motif on the top layer of paper or fabric. Draw around it again, leaving 1/4 inch between the lines. When cut, this will reveal the second layer. Cut other designs in the top layer. Insert third and fourth colors between top and bottom layers."[1]
5. If the mola is to be sewn, turn back the edges and sew them down using a hem or blind stitch. When illustrating details such as eyes or mouth, use a chain or running stitch.

a) The hem or blind stitch - a regular sewing stitch. Bring the needle up through the background cloth, catching only the edge of the cloth to be appliquéd. Reinsert the needle close to the same point in order to keep the surface thread as invisible as possible. Continue in the same manner.

b) The running stitch.

c) The chain stitch.

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[1] Mary Beth Trece, Lawrence High School, Lawrence, Kansas, *Learning about Latin America*, quarter course teaching unit for secondary school classes, "Activity - Mola Making."

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Poetry

Blackwell, A.S. (1929). *Some Spanish-American poets.* New York: D. Appleton and Co.
Collection of Spanish-American works representing 19 countries.

Young poetry of the Americas. Washington, D.C.: Organization of American States.
A sampling of poetry from ten countries including the chapter "Avant-Garde Poetry in Panama" by Aristides Martínez Ortega. Text in English with poems In English and Spanish.

Audio Visual

Comparsa Panameña de Washington, DC.
This is the committee that prepares the float for the annual festival in Washington. For information about upcoming events, call 301-949-0097, 301-94203414, 301-434-4052, or 301-890-9113.

Panama: The canal and country. (1988) Washington: Center for Defense Information.
The video provides an historical perspective of the current troubles in this strategically important country. One of the TV series entitled "America's Defense Monitor." 30 min. VHS/Beta. Order from The Video Project, 5332 College Ave., Suite 101, Oakland CA 94618, 415-655-9050.

Panama: The fifth frontier. (1975). Pastor Vega.
Uses archival footage to outline the history of the Panama Canal and examines U.S. operation of the Canal Zone. Spanish with English subtitles. 78 min. 16mm black/white film. Rent from The Cinema Guild, 1697 Broadway, New York, NY 10019, 212-246-5522.